



NATIONAL VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

ArtsGram

A Daily Publication of the 2003 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival

Wednesday, October 8, 2003

The First Day

— by John W. Zewiske
Milwaukee VAMC —

Monday is over. The official greeting phase of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival 2003 is history. Oh yes, you may run into somebody you haven't seen yet as the week goes rushing by. And one of the best parts is the new people you meet everyday.

At the welcome dinner, the crowning event of the first day, we listened to Steve Gentling, medical center director, welcome us. The former Oklahoma state senator and artist, Enoch Kelly Haney, gave us a motivating keynote address. Then came the charge by host site coordinator Maureen Harvey to "Let the Festival begin." Chaplain Ken Blank concluded with the benediction, asking all to remember those in the service of our country. And, after a long day of travel to a city many had never been, some went to their rooms for a night of rest.

Well, that may be how it was for some. But others were so excited, going to bed was far from the agenda. The hospitality room was rockin'. The lounge was full of conversation. For me, I took the quieter route and walked to the



Albert Gray Eagle, an Oklahoma City resident, plays in dark hours wearing his Sooner cap. His cedar flute was a gift from a friend. Gray Eagle's picture is featured on the 2003 Creative Arts Festival poster and program booklet.

Oklahoma City National Memorial about five blocks away.

It very was quiet there. For a brief moment, I thought I was the only one there. But I was wrong. I walked in and saw the 168 chairs subtly lit. I could feel my heart pounding. The stillness of the reflecting pool was obvious and the running water was easy to hear in the trafficless night. The tragedy of it all.

As I stood there in the darkness, I heard the piercing wail of sirens as an ambulance and a fire truck rushed to someone's aid in a

nearby condo. How ironic, as the red lights flashed across the walls of the memorial. As I crossed the street to a large marble statue with his back turned to the memorial and his eyes covered with his hand. I read the inscription: "And Jesus Wept."

Returning to the hotel, I was greeted with the sweet sound of *America the Beautiful* being played on a flute. I stood and listened.

Albert Gray Eagle was the artist sitting on the sidewalk with his friends, making ready and practicing for the week ahead. In the lobby, we talked about his music and his life. At 47 and a U.S. Army veteran, Gray Eagle has had his share of life-changing experiences. He is thankful for the care he has received at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. He is grateful to be here. "It is living an experience with open eyes." He could not have always said that.

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**"Hitch your wagon to a star."
- Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Veterans Exhibit Artwork and Spirit

– by Mary Sampson and Tammie Kierstead
Oklahoma City VAMC –

On Tuesday, 37 visual artists displayed and explained their gold medal artwork at the VA Medical Center. Their stories were compelling, as they overcame significant medical and emotional problems to produce their pieces, in many different categories.

JoAnne Greco, an Air Force veteran, retired after the Gulf War. She took up knitting as a teen and resumed after she retired. Her intricately knitted child's sweater, tunic and cap set is a design from Ireland, with stitches representing love, hope and faith.

Edmond Melton from Fresno, Calif., learned leather tooling in high school and did not return to it until after becoming blind for approximately six years due to cataracts. After regaining his sight, he worried about dying before making a leather purse for his mother, so the first one he made was for her. He gets a real joy from taking a piece of leather and turning it into something beautiful.

John Velazquez stumbled into the creative arts shop while in the VA Long Beach hospital. He developed an interest in creating turquoise jewelry and gives away everything he makes. With a wife, three daughters, and



Maureen Howell from Tomah, Wisconsin explains her winning artwork.



Levonina George, wife of artist Jess George describes her husband's painting.

exhibits of some well-known artists, and this meets all those standards," she said.

Debbie Hamilton, a home economics teacher at Cordell High School, along with six high school students are volunteering at the Festival. She felt the kids are enjoying themselves, and that volunteering gave them "a sense of self-pride as well as an understanding of what some of these disabled veterans are all about." They were moved by the veterans' inspirational stories of what they had experienced and turning that into art.

One student, Blaire Butler, 18, said, "I like the 'Eagles in the Valley,' by Larry House of Louisville, Ky. 'It connects with the world today. The men are in uniform and my brother is leaving soon to serve his country in Iraq.'" Another student, Eric Hamilton, said, "This is a great place for the veterans to express themselves and how proud they are to be a vet."

Levonina George, wife of artist Jess George of Sepulveda, Calif., described her husband's pastel painting entitled, "Heading Home." She told the story of a cowboy at the end of his road. "George, 80, is a veteran of the U.S. Navy. 'I think my husband always wanted to be a cowboy,'" she said.



Larry Tomavick from Anacortes, Washington, answers questions about his award winning table.

five granddaughters, Velazquez never has any trouble finding takers for his jewelry.

For some spectators, family and volunteers, the exhibit got great feedback. Lynn Cooper, an occupational

therapist from Oklahoma City described the artwork as "phenomenal," and the skill of the artist "just incredible. I've attended art

Ten Tips to Better Photography

"The [35mm] camera is for life and for people, the swift and intense moments of life." - Ansel Adams

1. Hold It Steady

A problem with many photographs is that they are blurry. Avoid 'camera shake' by holding the camera steady. Use both hands, resting your elbows on your chest, or use a wall for support. Relax: don't tense up. You are a marksman or woman, holding a gun, and it must be steady to shoot.

2. Put The Sun Behind You

A photograph is all about light, so always think of how the light is striking your subject. The best bet is to move around so the sun is behind you and to one side. This front lighting brings out color and shades, and the slight angle (side lighting) produces some shadow to indicate texture and form.

3. Get Closer

The best shots are simple so move closer and remove any clutter from the picture. If you look at most 'people' shots they do not show the whole body so you don't need to either. Move close, fill the frame with just the face, or even overflow it. Give your shot some impact. Use a zoom to crop the image tighter.

4. Choose a Format

Which way you hold the camera affects what is emphasized in your shot. For tall things, (like the Redwoods or Half Dome) a vertical format emphasizes height. Use a horizontal format to show the dramatic sweep of the mountains.

5. Include People

Photographs solely of landscape and rocks are enjoyable to take but often dull to look at. Include some of your friends, companions, family, or even people passing by to add human interest. If there is no one around, include yourself with the self-timer. Have you ever gotten your photos back only to discover that something that looked awe-inspiring at the time looks dull on paper? This is because your eye needs some reference point to judge scale. Add a person, car, or something of known size to indicate the magnitude of the scenery.

6. Consider Variety

You may take the greatest shots but if they are all the same type or style, they may be dull to look at. Spice up your collection by adding variety. Include landscapes and people shots, close-ups and wide angles, good weather and bad weather. Take personal shots that remember the 'being there' – friends that you meet, your hotel or campsite, transportation, street or hiking signposts.

7. Add Depth

Depth is an important quality of good photographs. We want the viewer to think they are not looking at a flat picture but through a window, into a three-dimensional world. Add pointers to assist the eye. If your subject is a distant mountain, add a person or a tree in the foreground. A wide angle lens can exaggerate this perspective.

8. Use Proportion

The beauty of an image is often in its proportions. A popular technique with artists is called the Rule of Thirds. Imagine the frame divided into thirds, both horizontally and vertically, like a Tic-Tac-Toe board. Now place your subject on one of the lines or intersections. Always centering your subject can get dull. Use the Rule of Thirds to add variety and interest.

9. Search For Details

It is always tempting to use a wide angle lens and 'get everything in.' However, this can be too much and you may lose the impact. Instead, zoom in with a longer lens and find some representative detail. A shot of an entire sequoia tree just looks like a tree. But a shot of just the tree's wide base, with a person for scale, is more powerful.

10. Position The Horizon

Where you place the horizon in your shot affects what is emphasized. To show the land, use a high horizon. To show the sky, use a low horizon. Be creative.



"First Day," cont'd from page 1

He spoke of his life, his music, the loss of life just down the street and the war. The tragedy of it all. "I used to walk and not see what was on my sides. Now, I can really appreciate what I am seeing, what I am hearing." He played on with those soft notes wafting through the humid air.

We leave our families, our communities, just for a few days to come to show our best. We meet new people every day, we see old friends. We laugh and have fun. And in those moments, wherever and whenever they are, we remember. And maybe shed a quiet tear...

HOMETOWN NEWS AT THE CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL

As a reminder, the Hometown News Program at the Creative Arts Festival is totally web-based. Through this program, we generate an individual news release for any veteran who requested one, and make it available to their local media on the Festival web site. If you asked for a news release, they will be posted toward the end of the week (see www.va.gov/vetevent/caf/2003, under "Artist Information".) We will also be taking digital photos of as many of you as possible while you are rehearsing or displaying your artwork, and hope to have the best photo of each veteran on the web site by this Saturday. We will also provide one 4X6" print of that photo for you, as well as a copy of your personal news release.

The web-based Hometown News Program makes your information much more readily available to the media in your area. Unfortunately, however, it also means that we can no longer provide the many duplicate prints from film as we did in the past, since the photos are now digital.



We hope that you have brought along your cameras so you can ask your friends or Festival volunteers to take some action photos of you rehearsing, performing, displaying your artwork or attending Festival activities. Or, use that new disposable camera you received (and smile!)



Seven Ways to Sing Better with Less Practice

#1 Forget perfection.

The perfect voice is an absolute illusion. It does not exist. Try to develop a dependable vocal technique, but do not demand perfection. Some singers are always worrying about their voices, working on their high range one day, their breath control the next. They buy every vocal book, tape and video they can find, trying to learn what they think is a professional vocal technique. Then, they go sing with other performers and get depressed because they think the other singers are better. Once you have a dependable voice, stick with it -- even if it is not perfect.

#2 Stay with one method.

With all that is available for singers these days, you can get information

from hundreds of vocal teachers, each with a different concept of how to sing. It is easy to get confused. Instead, ask yourself two questions. "What method or teacher will I use?" and "What is my biggest vocal problem?" Learn one technique and then focus on your most common vocal fault.

#3 Practice smart, not long.

Your practice time needs to be short and focused. When you go to the practice room, focus on a few basics, such as posture, eliminating tension, filling the body with air or vocal flexibility. Limit your practice time. Work in focused stints, and then leave.

#4 Don't try 100 percent.

Do not think of every note as the end of the world. Develop a casual attitude toward singing. Trying too hard will prevent peak performance. Everybody has bad days as a singer, sometimes really bad days. One note is not life or death.

#5 Let it go!

Too many singers tighten up as they try to sing a song. They try to

force the voice into submission rather than focusing on the message of the song. While you are singing, you do not have time to think about technique and adjustments. Instead, just let the song happen. Compare it to a child in a swing. You pull him back, and then you just LET GO!

#6 You are unique.

If you take away a singer's personality or style, they will have trouble. If your voice sounds a little different or you sing in a very individualized style, it does not mean you cannot sing well. If you could not see some well known artists, but you could hear their voices, you would instantly recognize them. Don't duplicate or imitate other singers. Let your unique style develop.

#7 Focus on what is right, not what is wrong.

Too many singers focus on a problem, not what they do well. If a vocal problem arises, then go home after your concert, wait until the next morning and see if the problem goes away. It usually does.



Medical Support Room

The Medical Support Room is in room 1111. If you have a medical concern or issue, please contact your team leader. Medical support has a registered nurse on duty 24 hours a day. You can call the nurse from any house phone at extension 1111, or go directly to the room.

Meet with Your Team Leader

Meet with your team leader every morning (except Sunday) at 8:30 am on the second floor of the hotel. Sunday's meeting is at 11:30 am.

Hospitality Room

The Hospitality Room, manned by friendly volunteers, offers snacks, soft drinks, juices and coffee for all Festival participants, staff and volunteers.

Open daily from 9 am to 10 pm in room 318.

Professional Continuing Education

The 2003 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival has been approved to grant official continuing education units through ATRA (American Therapeutic Recreation Association) for the three sessions being offered this week. A total of 6 CEUs can be earned by attending all three sessions.

A fee of \$10.00 will include all CEUs earned by the participant for the entire National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Professional Education Sessions. The \$10.00 fee must be paid prior to the first session attended. Checks should be made out to VAMC #635, GPF #8832.

Today's Continuing Education

Today's continuing education class is "Positive Psychology." The class will be held in the Century Ballroom from 1:00 - 3:30 pm.

Rehabilitation Research Workshop

Dr. Terence M. Keane, Ph.D., director of the National Center for PTSD, VA Boston Healthcare System, will be presenting an overview of the nature and causes of PTSD. The workshop will be held in the Kiamichi Room from 3:30 - 4:30 pm.



Wednesday, October 8

Breakfast

Assorted Fruit Juices
Danish and Assorted Muffins
Scrambled Eggs, Crispy Bacon
Breakfast Potatoes
Country Biscuits and Sausage Gravy
Starbuck's Coffee and Milk

Lunch

Artichoke and Red Pepper Salad
Tossed Salad, Fruit Salad
Chef's Choice of Vegetables
Pan Seared Chicken
with Wild Mushrooms
and Demi-glace
Baked Rainbow Trout
with Lemon Butter and Pecans
Variety of Pies and Cakes
Coffee and Iced Tea

Dinner

National Cowboy Hall of Fame
Catered BBQ Dinner
Smoked Chicken, Chopped Brisket
or Pork Loin
Potato Salad, Baked Beans
Green Beans
Homemade Hot Rolls
Chocolate Cake, Cherry Cobbler
Peach Cobbler
Iced Tea and Lemonade

**Today's
Weather**



79°

Partly Cloudy

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

ARTISTS

PERFORMERS

7 – 8:30 am

Breakfast

– Westin Hotel, Century Ballroom

9:00 am – Meet with team leader

9:30 am – Load bus

10:00 am – Noon

Tour Oklahoma City Art Museum

Noon – Return to hotel

12:30 – 1:30 pm

Lunch

– Westin Hotel, Century Ballroom

1:30 – 3:30 pm

Caricaturists draw portraits at hotel

– Second Floor Lobby

5:00 pm – Load buses

5:30 – 7:00 pm

Dinner

Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum

7:00 – 9:30 pm – Tour of the Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum

8:00 – 9:30 pm – Native American Dancers at the Cowboy Hall of Fame

8:00 pm and **9:30 pm** – Shuttle to hotel

9:30 – 11:00 pm

Karaoke and Social Time

– Westin Hotel, Kiamichi Room

7 am

7:30

8

8:30

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9:30

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Noon

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10:30

11

7 – 8:30 am

Breakfast

– Westin Hotel, Century Ballroom

8:30 am – Meet with team leaders

9:00 – 10:00 am – Chorus number rehearsal – Plaza Room

10:00 – 11:00 am – Auditions for solos and narrations – Plaza Room

11:00 am – Noon – Second coaching

10:00 – 11:00 am – Chorus number rehearsal – Great Plains Room

10:00 – Noon – Selected acts rehearse and Costume fittings – Red Carpet Room

Noon – 1:00 pm

Lunch

– Westin Hotel, Century Ballroom

1:00 – 4:30 pm – Second coaching of acts – Plaza Room

1:00 – 2:30 pm – All performers for Faces, Come Shine, and Star Spangled Banner

– Continuous fittings – Red Carpet Room

2:30 – 3:30 pm – Chorus number rehearsal – Great Plains Room

2:30 – 4:30 pm – Rehearsal of narrations/silhouette solos – Century Ballroom

3:30 – 4:30 pm – Rehearsal of production number solos and Star Spangled Banner Small Ensemble – Great Plains Room

5:00 pm – Load buses

5:30 – 7:00 pm

Dinner

Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum

6:30 – 9:30 pm – Music Director Rehearses with Orchestra

7:00 – 9:30 pm – Tour of Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Museum

8 – 9:30 pm – Native American Dancers

8:00 pm and **9:30 pm** – Shuttles to hotel

9:30 – 11:00 pm

Karaoke and Social Time

– Westin Hotel, Kiamichi Room

“Hitch your wagon to a star.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson